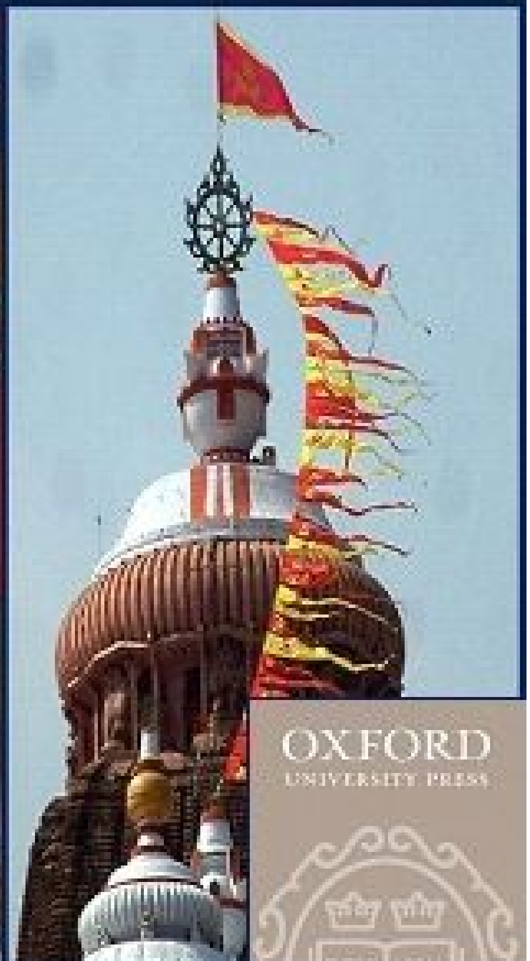
Origin & Antiquity of the Cult of Lord Jagannath

Avinash Patra, Sr.







"A new theme of the cult of Lord Jagannath".
~*The Guardian*~

Origin & Antiquity of the Cult of Lord Jagannath

Avinash Patra

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Dedicate this Journal to my Lord Jagannātha



Image of Lord Jagannath

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Contents

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Origins of the Cult of Jagannath-Alternative Theories

Vedic Origin of Lord Jagannath

In the Rig-Veda, 10.155.3, there is mention of a Daru (log of wood) floating in the ocean. Vedic prayers have indicated for taking shelter in the Daru.

In spite of the fact that Acharya Sayana, the noted commentator on the Vedas, has categorically interpreted the hymn with Jagannath as the Daru floating at the sea shores, some scholars have refuted this interpretation under the argument that the hymn deals

Buddhist Origins
with 'Alaxmi Stava' of Arayi.

William Bruton, the first English traveler to visit Puri and to see the Jagannath temple, made certain counter-factual observation in 1633 that the image of Jagannatha "is in shape like a serpent, with seven heads" and the holy pagoda is "the mirror of all wickedness and idolatry". Thus, Lord Jagannath became known to Europeans as a pagan divinity of monstrous form. To the Europeans, the iconography of Jagannatha remained a mystery from the time of Bruton's visit until the 19th century. Bernier, who visited Puri in 1667 and left the first reliable description of the Car Festival, but failed to give any account of the image. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier later on described in detail the priceless jewellery of Jagannatha, which however, he never saw.

With the more enlightened views of the 19th century, the problem of the iconography of Jagannatha became a fascinating field for speculation. After the British occupation of Odisha in 1803, the temple and its priests received special treatment from the East India Company, which decided to protect the institution for economic and political reasons. Europeans were still excluded from the great sanctuary and even General Alexander Cunningham, one of the doyens of Indian archaeology, had a rather vague knowledge of the appearance of the Puriimages, chiefly based, it seems, on secondary sources. The restrictions imposed on non-Hindus did not prevent a number of scholars from observing University of Oxford Journal

the strange rites at Puri, which included the suspension of caste-rules during the Car Festival, nor from drawing conclusions concerning the origins of the cult of Jagannath.

As per noted Jagannath cult researcher, O. M. Starza, since the complex rites of the Brahmins had given Christian scholars a low opinion ofHinduism, they endeavoured (in their ignorance)(sic) to explain the enlightened features of the Jagannath cult by suggesting that it originated in the noble religion of the Buddha. It was thought, for instance, that the temple of Puri occupied almost certainly the site of an earlier Buddhist shrine, without any real evidence to support this view; while General Alexander Cunningham's suggestions that the figure of Jagannatha was derived from the Buddhist symbol of the triratna or taurine was accepted even by such authorities as the Sri LankanBuddhist scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy.

In the Bhilsa Topes [3], Alexander Cunningham has identified the Jagannath triad as the Buddhist

triad. Cunningham argues that the following two points are sufficient to conclude in favour of the Buddhist triad:

"the suspension of caste during the festival and the belief that the image contains the relics or bones of Krishna". In support of second point he says that "(it) is also not at all Brahmanical, it is eminently characteristic of Buddhism."

Cunningham asserts that the Brahma Padartha/Mani (Divine Life material) is nothing but a [2] Buddhist relic (Buddha's Tooth).

In the same line, noted writers like W. W. Hunter, A. Stirling, John Beames and N. K. Sahu in book ‘A History of Orissa’, Dr. H. K. Mahtab in his ‘History of Orissa’, and Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha in his ‘The Saga of the Land of Jagannatha’ opine that it is a Buddhist triad.

In fact, there is no historical evidence of worship of Jagannath at Puri prior to the 10th century A.D. when Yayati Kesari was the ruler. The Buddhist University of Oxford Journal

King Indirabhuti's Jnanasiddhi mentions about the place of Jagannath. Pandit Neelakantha Das has mentioned that the Savaraswere worshipping the image of Jagannath made of neem wood in a place called Sambal (Samal, now in Talcher of Angul District) in Uddiyan, the kingdom of Indrabhuti, which was even prior to the rule of Yayati Kesari I. Indrabhuti has described Jagannath as Buddhist deity inJnanasiddhi. In the narrative of Indrabhuti, Jagannath was worshipped by the Savaras in one of the Budha Viharas. During the rule of King Sasanka and feudatory chief Madhav Raj-II, many anti-Buddhist campaigns were undertaken. Therefore, the Buddhist Jagannath was shifted before the arrival of Hieun-Tsang and destruction of the Puspagiri Vihar. In this period, Indrabhuti emerged as a worshipper of Jagannath in 717 A.D. There are various opinions about the place where the image of Jagannath was lying buried. The Madala panji (The temple Chronicles) identifies this place with the village Gopali of Sonepur district of Odisha. The Madala panji records legend of king Yayatirecovering the wooden images of Jagannath from the Sonepur region where it lay buried for over 144 years. Thereafter, king Yayatireconstructed the wooden images from Sonepur forest tribes.

Despite the above arguments of the scholars stressing upon the Buddhist origin of Jagannath, it has not been historically ascertained whether the deity Jagannath as worshipped by Indrabhuti was just a coincidental homonym with the present Jagannath or referred to the same deity.

It has been argued that subsequently there has been complete dissociation between Lord Jagannath and Buddha by the complete obliteration of Gautama Buddha from the Dashavatara pantheon and presenting Lord Jagannath as the ninth Avatar in place of Gautama Buddha, or alternatively Balarama. The Dashavatara panel in the Nata Mandir of the Jagannath Temple at Puri bears testimony to this assertion.
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Tribal Origins

The Jagannatha Temple at

Polish Indologist Olgierd M. Starza has reviewed various theories on
Puri: Its Architecture, Art And Cult

the tribal, Buddhist, Jain, or Vaishnav origins of Shri Jagannath in
, (1993) (page no.s 53-64) and has arrived at the
conclusion that "…several early theories regarding the origin of Jagannatha have been refuted; only the tribal theory remains a possibility..." (page no.72).

The factors responsible for the acceptance of tribal origin theories are as under:

(i) The structure and shape of Shri Jagannath deity is commensurate to a pillar. The Savaras, the earliest tribal inhabitants of Odisha, were tree worshipers, and their rituals involved dancing and singing before the 'Kitung' or 'Jaganata' or God. It has been argued by some authors that when the Vedic Aryans migrated to Odisha, they adopted the local tribal tradition of 'Jaganata' worship, and effected the transformation of the tribal wooden pillar 'Jaganata' to aryanized 'Jagannath'. In fact, among tribals of Vindhya region, tree or khamba (pillar or post) worship is prevalent.

(ii) A deep association of a class of non-Brahmin, tribal origin servitors, called Daitas, exists with the worship of the Jagannath deities. TheseDaitas are the hereditary servitors of Lord Jagannath. They are inextricably and exclusively connected with the funeral rites of Shri Jagannath during the Nava Kalevara (New embodiment/renewal) ritual and bear the sole responsibilities of Snana Yatra and Shri Gundicha Yatra. The instances of worship of Shri Jagannath by Savara is also mentioned in Darubrahma Gita written by Jagannath Dasa in the 16th Century A.D. and in Deula Tola written by Nilambara Das in the 17th Century A.D.

(iii) The images of the Jagannath triad are built out of neem wood, as opposed to universal use of stone for construction of images of allbrahminical Hindu deities.
(iv) There is no caste distinction in the cult of Jagannath which is akin to the practices of tribals and significantly different from Vaishnavism.
Thus, analysing the legendary association of Jagannath with a class of aborigines, called Savaras, the peculiar shape as a pillar and typical nature of the wooden icon of the University of Oxford Journal deity and his associates, Balabhadra and Subhadra; many scholars have held that Jagannath has originally been a tribal deity of Savara origin.
i.e.

Anncharlott Eschmann has pointed out that the Nava Kalevar (New Embodiment) ritual, the ceremony of periodical renewal of the body of the deity is a tribal custom. Such practices of renewal of wooden deity are found among the primitive tribes like Savaras and Khonds.

British historian William Wilson Hunter in the first volume on the British province of Orissa and the temple of Jagannath has remarked that the aboriginal people worshiped a Blue Stone inside dense forests as Nila Madhava. Hunter in Orissa: Volum I ascribed the blue (Nila) colour to the use of the common chlorite schist stone of Odisha hills in which all the ancient images of Odisha were being made. As per Hunter, the Dravidian God, who was offered raw, uncooked food by the primitive tribes. Hunter hypothesized that with the passage of time, the Aryan elements assimilated Shri Jagannath into fold of Hinduism where as per more sophisticated customs, Jagannath is being offered

cooked food. The synthesis is clear even at present since worship methods of both these two folds (Tribal and Brahminical) coexist side by side at the Jagannath Temple, Puri.

Pandit Nilakantha Das in “The Orissa Historical Review Journal, April 1958”, opines that Savari Narayana of Madhya Pradesh (Dakshina Kosala), was brought to Puri from Phuljheur of Madhya Pradesh where a wooden deity was worshiped. This Narayana of the Savaras and became Jagannath.

Prof. B.C. Mazumder (ed), in the “Typical Selections from Oriya Literature”, 1921, maintains that Seori-Narayana has been located in theBilaspur district of present Chhattisgarh state, which was then in the kingdom of Dakshin Kosala, where in the 7th century A.D. a line of rulers of Hinduized Savara origin, established its rule with Sivpur, in the north of Raipur, for its capital.

Verrier Elwin, anthropologist, ethnologist and tribal activist, in his book “Religion of an Indian Tribe” has narrated that:
University of Oxford Journal

"The god Jagannatha had appeared in Seori-Narayana and an old Savar used to worship him. The king of Orissa had built the great temple at Puri and wished to install Jagannatha in it, and he found a Brahmin to fetch it from Seori-Narayan, but nobody knew where it was except the old hermit, Savar. The Brahmin besought him in vain to be allowed to see the god and even went so far as to marry his daughter, and finally the old man consented to take him blindfolded to the place. The Brahmin, however, tied some mustard seeds on a corner of his cloth and made a hole in it so that they dropped out one by one on the way. After sometime they grew up and served to guide him to the spot. The Brahmin then went to the Seori-Narayana alone and begged the god to go to Puri. Jagannatha consented and assuming the form of a log of wood, floated down the Mahanadi to Puri, where he was taken out and placed in the temple."

As per Verrier Elwin there is an alternative Savara legend, according to which there are three most important and prominent kittungs (Gods) - two brothers and a sister, Ramma, Bimma and Sitaboi. Ramma is always coupled with the brother Bimma. The legend maintains that it was from them that the Savara tribe was born. Such a set up has significant resemblance to the Jagannath triad.

The argument, that because there is no caste distinction inside the Jagannath temple, the images are of Buddhist descent, cannot be accepted on merit. Verrier Elwin has argued that:

"they (The Savars) have no caste feeling, and they do not excommunicate one of their members if he changes his religion. Most of them have no idea of untouchability and accept
Jagannath triad

food even from the Douss (Douss are treated as inferiors)" (The Religion of an Indian Tribe). Though Dr.Mayadhar Mansinha thought it ( ) to be a Buddhist triad, in his other book History of Oriya Literature he writes: "Originally a god of the tribal Savaras, and adopted later successively by the Aryan faiths of Jainism, Buddhism, Tantricism and Vaishnavism, Jagannatha bears the indelible impress of each of these cults even today. The traditions and practices which centre in an around this famous temple are also still South Indian or Dravidian to a large extent."
University of Oxford Journal

The theory that Jagannath triad is a Vaishnava Cult has been ruled out as there is no
Brahma Padartha

semblance of Nila Madhava in the present triad images, nor are three images on the same platform being worshiped by the Vaishnavites. Further, the (life substance) has been argued not to be Lord Krishna's mortal remains, since puritanism in

*i.e.*the Vaishnavism does not permit mortal remains to be inserted in a sacred image.*Brahma Padartha* Further, the Buddhist relic, the tooth relic, cannot be the (Life material), as the relic has been kept at Anuradhapur inSri Lanka.

In connection to the possible tribal origins of the Jagannath cult, a pertinent point has been raised by Pandit Nilakantha Das in "The Orissa Historical Review Journal, April 1958", whereby it has been argued that:

"Before Choraganga actually came to Orissa it appears from tradition that, Nilmadhava so much made of the Nihilists and perhaps accepted by the local Savaras, with whom also perhaps mixed up Uddas, has just been replaced by the image of the neem-wood, called Sawrinarayana. Choraganga instead of disapproving the attempt seemed to take ready advantage of the incident, specially as his Hindu patriotism as well as the imperialistic outlook dictated him to make the powerful Savara element of his newly annexed land completely his own and consequently, the new god more liberal and universally popular among these Savara people as well as the Hindu public. Jaina or Buddhist worship and practice were also retained there in making the offering acceptable by all clans and castes with equal reverence."

All the above facts and arguments point out to a possible tribal origin of the Jagannath worship.

Tribal Narasimha Origins

As per current predominant thought, Jagannath, embodies the metamorphosis of tribal god into a pre-eminent deity of the classical Hindu pantheon. The icon is carved out of wood (not stone or metal), and the tribes whose rituals and traditions were woven into his worship are still living as tribal and semi-tribal communities in the region. This tribal god University of Oxford Journal

may have taken a fairly circuitous route to his present pinnacle, via absorption of local shakti traditions and merger with the growing popularity of the Narasimha and Purushottam forms of Vishnu in the region in the medieval era.

As regards to archeological findings, Queen Vasata in the eighth century A.D. built the famous Lakshman temple built in brick at Sripur or Shreepur on the banks of river Mahanadi in present Mahasamund district. Sirpur or Shreepur was then the capital of Dakshin Kosala(Chhattisgarh region) kingdom. The Laxman temple is believed to have been built in the 8th century by Vasata, the daughter of King Suryavarma of Magadh. The temple plaque opens with a salutation to Lord Purushottam, also titled Narasimha, suggesting a trend inVaishnav tradition to stress the ugra (violent) aspect of Vishnu. This possibly culminates with Lord Jagannath, widely revered as Purushottamuntil the end of

.
the 13th century, which had close connections with Narasimha who became popular in Orissa in the post-Gupta period

After Anantavarman Chodagangadev, who commissioned the temple at Puri, his chief queen, Kasturikamodini, built a temple in his homeland in Tekkali (present Andhra Pradesh), east of his first capital Kalinganagar, in 1150 AD. The temple was dedicated to the god Dadhivaman, and the inscription reveals that the image installed was of the wooden God, and not the famous Puri Trinity of Jagannath-Balabhadra-Subhadra. Scholars maintain that such fact means that Chodagangadev was a devotee of this god, and as the god's name is preserved in Tekkali in this early period, it seems likely that Dadhivaman (or the tribal form of this Sanskritised name) was the original name of the wooden God.

As the original wooden God was a unitary figure, temples for the single deity continued to be built even after a Trinitarian image emerged at Puri. Even today there are 344 Dadhivaman temples in Orissa, which perpetuate the original state of the god. The Kondh continue to practice a ritual renewal of wooden posts.

There is also something striking about the figures comprising the Jagannath triad. Subhadra's image consists of only a trunk and a head, but Jagannath and Balabhadra are University of Oxford Journal

larger, with a trunk, over-dimensional head, and arm stumps. But while the heads of Subhadra and Balabhadra are oval with almond-shaped eyes, Jagannath's head is curiously flat on top and is dominated by enormous round eyes.

Scholars explain this in terms of Narasimha's association with wooden posts representing tribal deities. In the Andhra village Jambulapadu (Anantapur), Narasimha Svami is worshipped as a pillar to which a sheet shaped in the form of a lion's head is attached. This lion-head explains Jagannath's large round eyes, typical of Narasimha on account of his fury (krodh). The head of the Jagannath image makes sense when perceived as a lion's head,

Certain Facts regarding the Origin and Evolution of Jagannath

where the emphasis is on the jaws, rather than as a human head.
The following salient issues emerge from the discussion:

(i) The wooden deity is of very remote ancestry, but the exact lineage has not been established due to paucity of archeological and epigraphic evidences.
(ii) Both the terms Jagannath and Purushottama are descriptive epithets. These are derivatives of the description of the supreme Godhead asPurushottama in the Bhagavat Gita or Jagannath in Valmiki Ramayan.

(iii) All the rulers of the region had worshipped this deity as their own and had left marks of their own beliefs and rituals into the cult.

(iv)The present triad is a later innovation. Even the Vaishnavite legend of Indradyumna does not mention the triad. The single God may have become a triad because of the different religious outlook that the ruling powers were upholding. During the reign of emperor Kharavela, a single deity Kalinga Jina existed. No evidence or information exists about the pre-Kharavela period. Hence, it has been assumed that since at the time of emperor Kharavela, there was a single deity, the possible assumption of

existence of a triad does not stand.Myths and Legends of Origin and Emergence of Lord Jagannath

The legends regarding the origin of Jagannath,which have been recorded in various sources such as Mahabharat of Sarala Das, Deula Tola of Nilambar Das, Skanda Purana, Brahma University of Oxford Journal

Purana, Narada Purana, Padma Purana, Kapila Samhita etc., suggest the tribal as well asBrahmanical links of the deity in the initial stage. The following principal Puranic legends **Traditional Version**are associated with the emergence of Lord Jagannath:

[1]

The Puranic text Purusottama Mahatmya contains the Indradyumna legend and the origin of Jagannath's wooden idol at Puri. As per the legends, in the Saty yuga, Indradyumna was a king in lunar dynasty. A traveling pilgrim once described before Indradyumnaabout the great God Nila Madhava (Blue Vishnu) being worshipped at Nilachala (Blue Mountain) in Odra (Odisha) and disappeared after telling the story. As wished by king, his priest went with his younger brother Vidyapati to search for the legendary divinity Nila Madhava. Vidyapati reached the big forest in Savardvipa on banks of river Mahanadi. Savara king Visvavasu received Vidyapati and assured him to show Nila Madhava on next morning. Vidyapati did not touch food or water before seeing the Lord. Seeing eagerness of Vidyapati, the Savara king got him bathed in Rohini-kunda and beseated him under the kalpa tree (banyan), and then showed him Nila Madhava being worshipped by the Devas. Then Vidyapati returned to Avanti (India), the capital of King Indradyumna. After listening to Vidyapati's account, king Indradyumna set out for Nila Madhava with prince, priest, Vidyapati and followers. But when Vidyapati had returned to Malava, that day itself Lord Nila Madhavahad disappeared and the entire area was covered with golden sand of the coast. So upon reaching at the spot, the king was unable to seeNila Madhava. The shocked king Indradyumna was apprised of the message of Brahma by Narada that the King has to worship the Lord with thousand asvamedha yajnas.

The divination of Lord Nila Madhava went on as this:

"In this world I will not give you darshana in the form of Nila Madhava, but I will manifest in four forms: Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra, andSudarshana charka. Wait near Cakra tirtha, and a daru would come afloat. I will manifest in the form of a very large, fragrant, reddish log, and the signs of sankha, cakra, gada, and padma will be seen everywhere on University of Oxford Journal

that form. Go there. Take Me out and make four deities from that log. Then you will be able to worship Me."

Upon the devotion of the King, the Lord Purusottama himself took the form of Visvakarma and secretly made the idols of daru (wood). Thereafter, Brahma himself established the holy idols on Vaishakha Sukla 8th, Thursday, on Pushya star.

The traditional version lacks historical support as even now there has been failure to determine definitively the identity of King Indradyumna as well as that of the then deity Nila Madhava. On

account of such lack of historicity, the traditional account of emergence and origin of Shri Jagannath remains a myth only. However, in Kantilo town of Odisha, there is a temple dedicated to certain deity named Nila Madhava, whosegenealogy is uncertain.

Vaishnavite Version

The second legend has been associated with Vaishnava sect and narrates that Lord Krishna appeared before a great devotee, KingIndradyumna and ordered him to carve a deity from a log Daru which would eventually be found washed up on the sea shore of Puri. Upon coming across the sacred log, King Indradyumna searched for a craftsman to carve the idols. In due course of time, a mysterious old Brahmin carpenter appeared before King Indradyumna and took the responsibility and took a few days to accomplish that. In fact, the carpenter was the divine carpenter Visvakarma in disguise. The carpenter insisted and put a strict condition for completion of the work that he would not be disturbed while he was carving the image of the deity and thereafter, started working in complete isolation behind closed doors. The strict condition put by the divine carpenter was that no one should enter into the temple premises inside which he would be carving the images. Everyone including the King Indradyumna and the Queen were very much anxious about the divine carving and every day came outside the closed door to listen to the sound of carving and woodwork as emerging from inside. After few days of waiting anxiously University of Oxford Journal

outside the room, the carpenter did not emerge and suddenly, all sound stopped. The impatient Queen worried about the fate of the carpenter and assuming the worst, opened the doors. The Queen found the idols of the deity half-finished and the carpenter vanished, since the divine condition of non-entry into the temple was breached. The mysterious carpenter was none other than Vishvakarma, the heavenly architect. King Indradyumna found that the deity had no arms nor legs and those continue to exist in that unfinished form till present.

Puranic Version

As per the Skanda Purana, the divine prophesy was that King Indradyumna would arrive at the Purushottam kshetra and thereafterIndradyumna would become so impressed with Purushottam kshetra, that he would settle down there for after renouncing Samsar. As per theSkanda Purana, Vishvavasu led Vidyapati across the steep heights of Neelachal mountain and showed him the Rohini kund and the kalpa tree on the east of the pond. The Lord Jagannath's temple was told to be situated between Rohin kund and the kalpa vat. Lord Tribhuneshwar then instructed Narad that Indradyumna should get constructed a magnificent temple of lord Jagannātha at the same place, where once existed his idol and presently which is hidden beneath the heap of sand. Later on, Vishwakarma carved out four idols from a single piece of wood, which was subsequently installed by Lord Brahma. The tree to which Narad had pointed was unique in the sense that it had only four branches on it. Indradyumna, following the instructions ordered to uproot the divine tree and then install it on the 'Mahavedi' inside the temple. As per divine design, Lord Vishnu manifested himself on the sacred altar on his own as an old carpenter. The divine condition was that the main door of the temple should then be shut and nobody should try to enter the temple or disturb the mason till the idols are ready.Indradyumna promised to follow these conditions and Vishwakarma began modeling the idols. However, on

curiosity, the King (Alternatively, Queen Gundicha) could not help stealing a glance at Vishwakarma’s work. Then, the idols were still incomplete. Vishwakarma, exasperated at the breach of promise, vanished without completing the work. Thus, Lord Jagannath remained with incomplete limbs, alongwith Balabhadraand Subhadra.
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Sarala Mahabharat Version

According to Sarala Dasa's Mahabharat, the mortal remains of Lord Krishna transformed into wooden form and floated up to the Puri sea shore; whereby, Jara Savara, an aborigine, picked it and worshipped it. Subsequently, King Indradyumna, the king of Somavamsa, got three wooden images made out of the log and set up a grand temple for the deities.

Despite repeated references to King Indradyumna in the Jagannath lore, Indradyumna remains a legendary figure, and his historicity cannot be established on any safe ground. Some have identified him with the Indradyumna of the Mahabharat and considered him to be quite an ancient figure of early Vedic era. As per the version of poet Sarala Dasa's Mahabharat, Indradyumna can be identified with Indraratha, the Somavamsi king of tenth century A.D. But identification of Indradyumna with Indraratha is at variance with the long-accepted tradition, that Yayati-I, the remote predecessor of Indraratha, built the Jagannath temple at Puri.

Symbolic Representation

Jagannath has been depicted as the symbol of godhead in certain other belief systems and faiths as under:
In Vaishnavism, the Jagannath form is worshiped as the abstract form of Krishna. The follower of Shaiva Culture maintain that the original shape of Jagannath was in shape of a Linga. Deity Balabhadra is also named asShiva and Ananta Vasudev.

The Shaktas claim that in tantra systems, Jagannath has been accepted as Bhairava & associate deity Vimala represents 'Bhairavi'. Such a belief is reinforced by the ritual whereby only after offering of the 'Jagannātha Bhog' at Goddess Vimala, it is considered as Maha Prasad'. *Namoh Jagannātha Buddhaya*

Followers of Buddhism pray Jagannātha in mantra ' '. In their opinion, Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadrarepresent the Buddha-Sangha-Dhamma triad. A section of Buddhists believes that the tooth relic of Buddha is kept inside the Jagannath idol University of Oxford Journal

at the navel circle. Buddists draw parallel in claiming that the Jagannātha Rath-Yatra is like the of Rath Yatra for Buddha. The Buddhists also do not follow casteism in society, which is also followed in the Ananda Bazar of Jagannath.

The Jains believe that the word Jagannath has been derived from the word 'Jeenanath'. Jagannath idol resembles with the ancient Jain Idol. The 'Baisi Pahacha'(22 steps) leading to the temple has been constructed in the memory of 22 Jain tirthankars. The Jain saints are termed 'Kevlin's. Similarly, the offerings made to Jagannath is called 'Kaivalya'.

Certain Researchers argue that at the initial stage, Christian religion was inspired by Jagannātha Idol. The Christian symbol of Christian cross'X' (Cross) mark is placed on the rear side of Jagannātha idol. Western Researcher Levi H. Dowling has written in his book The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, that Jesus Christ had remained in the Jagannātha Temple for 4 years for preaching the cultivators & low caste people." However, being based on the Akashic records, there has been no cogent basis or evidence for such an assertion.

Epigraphic Evidence of Shri Jagannath and the Timeline

The antiquity of Shri Jagannath is supported by several historical, literary and epigraphic
318 A.D.
evidences.

: According to William Hunter, first appearance of Jagannath in history occurs during 318 A.D. when the priest fled with his image to escape the wrath of Raktabahu and **464 A.D.**his band of plunderers.

: As per A. B. Mohanty, the holy log was recovered by a King about 146 years later **475 A.D.**from the jungles of western kingdoms.

: The second reconstruction [First being the reconstruction from Nila Madhav shrine by King Indradyumna) of the Jagannath temple by Yayati Kesari and the renewal of the cult after Yavana invasion of Orissa in the 5th century A.D., as per Puri's late 16th century Madala Panji temple chronicles.
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Historian K. C. Panigrahi suggested that Puri's legendary account of the claimed invasion of Orissa under the Yavana general Raktabahu in the 4th/5th century A.D. during the reign of the legendary king Sovanadeva (Legendary) may contain a historical reminiscence of the conquest of Orissa by the Rastrakuta King Govinda III during the reign of the Bhaumakara king Subhakara deva who ruled in coastal Orissa around 800 A.D. And moreover, he pointed out that Jagannath's legendary absence of 146 years in western Orissa (between Raktabahu's invasion and Yayati's 'rediscovery' of Jagannath and reinstallment at Puri) corresponds more or less exactly with the space of time between the historical reigns of Subhakaradeva and Yayati-I, the Somavamsi ruler Yayati Kesari established the first regional kingdom of Orissa. The installation of Jagannath at Puri temple took place several years after Yayati Kesari had come to throne, viz., in Yayati's 9th regnal years. Moreover in both cases the images were renewed outside Puri. Yayati Kesari performed the great 'Vanayaga' ritual in the vicinity of his former capital near Sonepur of Odisha and Jagannath was finally reinstalled on at Puri only two years after the renewal of the idol. However, In Puri, too, no pre-sixteenth century sources of the Yayati Kesari account are known. Contemporary facts are fully silent about any activities of theSomavamsis at Puri, particularly of Yayati Kesari as builder of the first Jagannath temple at Puri. The silence of early medieval sources would be surprising in view of the many available Somavamsi inscriptions and other literary sources which could have mentioned or even praised Yayati Kesari and his great deeds at Puri. In Purusottama Mahatmya which has contained the Indradyumna legend and the origin of Jagannath's Daru Devata at Puri there is no mention of Yayati Kesari.

That there was an earlier temple of Jagannath at Purushottama Kshetra prior to the present one built by Chodaganga Deva in 12th century A.D., is established by Sanskrit playwright Murari Mishra’s Anargharaghava Natakam (c. 9th century), which refers to Purushottama being worshipped on the seashore. (Orissa Historical Research Journal, Vol. III, No. I, PP. 9-10). In the drama Anargharaghava Natakam, the name Purushottama is used to denote the place. In the Ganga rule the Jagannath temple was rebuilt by Gangeswar or Chodaganga Deva (1078-1147 A.D).

: In many copper plates dating 8th century A.D, mention of individuals bearing the name of Purushottama also substantiates the wide popularity of Purushottama Jagannath.

University of Oxford Journal **810 A.D.**

: Sankarcharya visits shrine at Puri in course of spiritual conquest over Buddhism and other denominations, and establishesGovardhana Matha at Puri upon mahavakya Prajñānam brahma(Brahman is Knowledge). Sankarcharya must have come across the image ofNila madhava as described in Skanda Purana as above, during his **1078 A.D.**

: Devayatana of Purushottama finds special mention in Krishna Mishra's Prabodha Chandrodaya Natakam (c.1078 A.D).

: Chodaganga Deva began the construction of the present temple in circa 1135 A.D. In the Dasgoba Copper Plate Inscription of the late 12th century, Chodaganga's grandson Rajaraja III praised his grandfather for having built the Jagannath temple which had been "neglected" by previous kings, as per Epigraphia Indica, XXXI, p.255, which indicates epigraphical evidence of the existence of a Jagannath temple at Puri before the construction of the present temple.

: The Vaishnava preachers of the 12th century viz. Sri Ramanujacharya, Acharya Nimbarka, Acharya Vishnuswami and SriMadhavacharya established monasteries at Jagannath Puri to spread their religious theories.

1211 A.D.: The Gitagovinda of Jayadeva mentions of the glory of Shri Jagannath.

: Emperor Anangabhima deva (1211- 1238 A.D) donated his vast empire to Sri Purushottama Jagannath and declared himself as his servant (Rauta). Due to his efforts several Jagannath temples were set up at different places in Orissa. During the Suryavamsi period (1435-1533 A.D.) the same trend continued.

: A sculptural piece of Konark temple of the 13th century A.D depicts its builder, King Narasimha-I, offering worship to Siva Linga, Purushottama Jagannath and Durga.

: Epigraphic sources reveal that the inscriptions of Bhanudeva II (1306-1328 A.D) of Eastern Ganga dynasty make the first mention of the name, 'Jagannath'. (South Indian Inscriptions, Vol. V, No. 1214). Thus, the name Jagannath has been used for the first time in the inscriptions of Bhanudeva-II as in "Puri Copper Plates of Bhanudeva-II", Ed. D.C.Sircar, JASB, XVIII, I, 1956, P.25. During the reign of Bhanudeva-II, a feudatory chief had University of Oxford Journal

made gifts at Sikurmam in the 3rd Anka of Jagannath Deva when Sri Bhanudeva was ruling. (Kalinga Historical Quarterly, I, P.251). According to the Puri Grant of 1313, Bhanudeva granted villages in the 7th Anka of Purushottama Jagannath deva. Thus in a private record Purushottama comes to be called Jagannath. It appears to be the earliest epigraphical reference to the name, Shri 'Jagannath'.

Late 16th century A.D.

: The destruction of the 'Darumurti' of Puri's Holy Trinity by Islamic barbarian iconoclast Kalapahara. According to N'mat Allah's Makhzan-i-Afghan of the year 1612 A.D., "every Afghan, who took part in campaign, obtained as booty one or two gold images, Kalapahara destroyed the temple of Jagannath at Puri which contained 700 idols made of gold, the biggest of which weighed 30 Mans" (M.A.Rahim, History of

1590-1592 A.D.

Afghan in India, A.D.1545-1631).

: The rise of Ramachandra Deva of Khurda and his renewal of the images of Lord Jagannath at Khurda in about 1587 and atPuri in 1590/92.

It has been argued somewhere that the most important message of the Bisar Mahanty and Yayati Kesari legends to Jagannath's devotees is proclaimed in the very beginning of the Madala Panji temple chronicle which commences with the words: *"Jagannath, the Lord of deities, never abandons Sri Purushottama (Puri) even though crores of Brahma (Brahmanda) are destroyed."*

Geography of the Jagannātha Centre: The Samkha Kshetra

The Blue Mountain is part of traditional division of Puri into seven concentric circles having the Lion throne in the palace of the Cosmic Man as their common centre. This type of plan, which is evidently inspired by the symbolism of the yantra of Hari-Narayana is illustrated by a painted map of the Samkha Kshetra (Samkha – Conch-shaped, Kshetra – Region: The Conch-shaped Region) found in the upper part of the southern entrance to the principal jagamohan of the Jagannatha Temple of Puri. University of Oxford Journal

n the Sacred Geography of Puri : Structure and Organisation and Cultural Role of a Pilgrim Centre, Nityanand Patnaik has detailed the following structure of the Puri centre:

The first zone is in the form of the archetypal circle within which the modem wooden icons are represented standing on the Lion throne. In the words of the Visrttt Reliasya of the Brahma Purana "In the centre of the seven enclosures, in the cave of the Blue Mountain there is an abode . . . full of “consciousness". The text explains that inside "the three innermost circuits, Vishnu, the highest Purusa, is present in the wooden form.

The second circuit is in the shape of a hexagon. In the six angles are depicted four goddesses) Durga-VimaIa, Kamala-Laksmi, Uttara Durga and Batamangala, together with Garuda on the south, and the summit of the Blue Mountain on the north. In the outer eastern facing spaces are found Sarasvati, the Salmotaru tree and the Golden Well. In the western ones are the sacred banyan tree, the Rohini Well and Ucchista Ganapati.

The third circuit consists of a circle with a sixteen-petalled lotus. On the petals are placed the eight Sivas and right Saktis who guard the Lion throne. These deities are found on the Blue Hill and are as follows: Agnisvara, Indranidevi, Ksetrapala, Svanabhairavi. Multtesvara. Citraltali, Vatamarltandeya, Katyayani, Gopesvara, Bedakali, Patalesvara, Bhuvartesvari, Vailtuntesvara, Jagnesvari, lsanesvara and Sitala.

The fourth zone is in the form of a yantra or square with four points of access. It corresponds to the Blue Mountain (Nila-achal/Niladri) with its gateways and steps.

The fifth circuit is in the shape of it sixteen-petalled lotus. This mandala comprises the Candis and Sambhus who guard the outer perimeter of the hill. The Sivas are Viiwesvara, Markantleiwara, Mahakalesvara, Karnainesvara, Muktesvara, Ugresvara, Kapala-mocana and Agnisvsra, also the Goddesses Visvesvari, the Saptamatrika (stone images of the Mothers from the Somavansi period at the Martandeya tirtha), Dakshinakali, Charchika, Alamesvari, Varahi, Vanadurga and Vaseli.

The sixth is in the form of a lotus which contains the major sacred bathing places and the four oldest monasteries at Puri. The panchatirtha consists of the Markandeya Pool, the Rohini Well, the King Indradyumna Lake and sometimes includes Svetaganga, while the University of Oxford Journal

four ashrama are Angira in the east, Bhrgu in the south, Pandu in the west and Markandeya in the north.

The seventh and last circuit is in the shape of a conch-shell. On the top of the shankha is a huge symbolising Lokanatha Svaymbhu, and on the tip, which is orientated towards the south-east, the Vilvesara temple. The last three Sivas, together with Kapalamocana and Goddess Ardhasini, act as the day and night guardians of the town, Nilakantha is the governor of the kshetra, Narasimha protects the places where the fire ceremony is performed. Both Svargadvara, with its cremation ground and Chakra tirtha are represented on the map. Surrounding the city is the sea below, the sky above and a branch of the Bhargavi River which forms the handle of the Sankha kshetra.

The Blue Mountain (Nila-achal/Niladri)

The abode of Shri Jagannth is known as the Nilachal or Niladri, (Nila (Blue) + Achal (Mount) = The Blue Mountain) and the Nilachal is a strong motif in the Jagannath cult. However, there is no such apparent geographic structure at Puri, the township being located at the coastal plains of Eastern Orissa. Such a reference to a seemingly non-existent mountain has been a matter of debate which throws light on the origin of the deity.

Heinrich Von Stietencron hypothesizes the actual existence of a mountain at Puri in the past and notes: 'No real mountain exists in the Puri town. Yet it is true that the Jagannātha temple was actually built on a hill which receded sharply on its western side. Drifting sands and the sediments of continuous settlement have combined to raise the ground at the foot of the hill considerably so that the difference in level to the temple is no longer striking. It can be noticed, however, when approaching the ancient Siva temples which were situated to the west and to the north of the Hill.'

Yet contrary to such opinion and popular belief, the platform of the Jagannātha temple, seems to be a totally man-made monument, not a modified natural hill. The Blue Mountain consists almost entirely of a platform, and at its north—western foot lies an artificial cave. This is approximately 25 feet below the level of the inner enclosure, for a staircase of about University of Oxford Journal

twenty steps leads down to the sanctum of PatalesvaraShiva, and gives some idea of the level of the original terrain. The site was obviously exposed to flooding during the monsoon season as once the river touched its lowest steps when it flowed in the broad road just in front of the temple.

Another hypothesis regarding the naming of Puri as 'Nilachal' has been advanced by the noted historian, Dr. K. C. Panigrahi, in his "History of Orissa" Pp. 338-339). It has been argued that no mountain existed at the Jagannath shrine, and:

“"Then the Bhaumas came from Assam in the first part of the eighth century A.D., ruled over Orissa, obtained the shrine from theSavaras, got the temple built on the spot and gave it the name Nilachala, which was the name of the famous shrine of Kamakhyain their homeland of Assam.".”

In the 19th century, certain scholars have imagined that the Nilachal (Blue Hill) concealed the debris of a former Buddhist monument. However, Puri cannot be identified with Dantapura and so far no Buddhist remains have been discovered there.

Malini Rivulet

During the reign of Bhanu Dev II in the early 14th Century A.D., an estuarine river named Malini was flowing across the Bada Danda and separating it into two sections.[9] Hence, Ratha Yatra was organised in two phases on each side of Malini. A pair of each of the three charioits, with a total of 6 chariots were being constructed for Rath Yatra. One set of the chariots carried the deity triad till River Malini, whereafter, three huge

pahandi

wooden boats were used to carry the idols across Malini river. Upon crossing of Malini, the images were again made through cycle and taken to Gundicha Temple. University of Oxford Journal

Metaphysical Attributes

Lord Jagannātha is describes as an Avataree i.e. the cause of the Avatars, and not merely an Avatar. Therefore, Shri Jagannātha does not have any life stories and lila as other Avatars like Parshurama, Rama, Krisna etc.

As per author Dipti Ray in “Prataparudra Deva, The last great Suryavamsi King of Orissa”:

“In Prataparudradeva’s time Oriya poets accepted Sarala Dasa's idea and expressed in their literary works as all the Avataras of Vishnu (Jagannath) manifest from him and after their cosmic play dissolute (bilaya) in him (Jagannath). According to them Jagannath is Sunnya Purusa, Nirakar and Niranjan who is ever present in Nilachala to do cosmic play…. The five VaishnaviteSakhas (Comrades) of Odisha during Prataparudradeva’s time expounded in their works that the idea that Jagannath (Purushottam) is Purna Brahman (i.e. god in toto) from whom other Avataras like Rama, Krishna, etc., took their birth for lilas in this universe and at the end would merge in the self of Purna Brahman…”

Iconography and Physical Appearance

The most significant of Jagannātha's many shrines is the temple at Puri, Odisha. In this temple, Jagannātha is part of a triad of deities that includes Lord Balabhadra and goddess Subhadra. Apart from principal companion deities Balabhadra, Subhadra, Lord Jagannātha is worshipped in the Shree Jagannātha Temple of Puri along with Sudarshana Chakra, Madhava, Sridevi and Bhudevi on the principal platform, Ratnavedi (Ratna: Bejewelled, Vedi: Platform/Pedestal - The bejewelled platform) in the inner sanctum sanatorium of the temple.

Unlike other deities of the Hindu pantheon (gods), there is no anthropomorphic or artistic aspect of the idol of Jagannath. The idol has not been designed to represent the image of a University of Oxford Journal

human being. The image has a massive square head and with the chest merging into one piece of wooden stump without any demarcation of the neck. The arms have been inserted in a line with the upper lip. The eyes are very large and round. And the waist is the limit of the body.

It has been hypothesized in the myths and legends that the idols of Jagannath, along with those of Balabhadra and Subhadra are unfinished, i.e. there are no identifiable limbs like hands, legs etc. Such a state of affairs mixed with the hearsay led William Bruton, the first English traveler to Puri, to state that the idol of Jagannatha "is in shape like a serpent, with seven heads". The top upper portion of heads of the deities are triangular in shape giving rise to the Trimundi (Triangular head).

The idol of Jagannath is about 6 feet tall. The color is predominantly black and the eyes are round and large. The eyes have three concentric circles - Red on the outer border, white in the middle and black in the center. The image of Balabhadra in the temple is also approximately 6 feet tall. Balabhadra's face is white, his eyes are oval-shaped, and his stump-like arms are at eye level. The Devi Subhadra statue is yellow in hue and stands about 5 feet tall. The goddess's eyes are also oval. The Sudarshana Chakra is approximately the same height as the two male deities and is red in color.

The idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana Chakra are made of neem wood.

Within the main compound of Jagannath Temple, Puri, there are over one hundred shrines of lesser importance which are devoted to the demigods in charge of universal affairs or the sub-controllers of the universe. In the midst of these lesser shrines is the main temple hall

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called the Bada Deula (The principal Temple), in which the predominating deity Jagannath appears

Symbol of Jagannath

The Nila Chakra is the most revered iconic symbol in the Jagannātha cult. The Nila Chakra is the only physical object whose markings are used as sacrament and considered sacred in Jagannath worship. University of Oxford Journal

Physically, the Chakra is found mounted on the top shikhar of the Jagannath temple. The Nila Chakra is a disc with eight Navagunjaras carved on the outer circumference, with all facing towards the flag post above. The Nila Chakra at Puri temple is made of alloy of eight metals (Asta-dhatu) and is 3.5 Meters (11 feet and 8 inches) high with a circumference of about 11 meters (36 feet).

The Nila Chakra is distinct from the Sudarshana charka which has been placed with the deities in the inner sanatorium. The Chakra symbolizes protection.

Reference of Shri Jagannath in various Literary Works and Texts

References and mention of Shri Jagannath have been found in numerous religious texts and semi-religious literary works.

The most ancient reference is found in the 3rd rca of the 155th sukta in the 10th Mandala of the Rig veda. In a sukta there is reference to sacred log (Daru) which runs as thus:

"Ado yad daru plavate sindhoh pare apurusam,
Tada rabhasva durhano, tena gaccha parastaram." (10.155.3 R.V.) Vedic Commentator Sayanacharya has ascribed this sukta to Shri Jagannath in the following manner:

"The exists on sea-shore in a far off place, the wooden image of a deity with name Purusottama;
O ye, by worshipping that wood so indestructible, attain the supreme place. University of Oxford Journal

However, the acceptance of this rca as referring to Shri Jagannath is not universal. Alternately, it has been argued by scholars that the rca is A laxmi Stava only.

In the Uttara Khanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, mention of Sri Jagannath has been found where Sri Rama has advised Vibhisana to devote himself to the worship of the deity, who has been described as the presiding deity of the Ikshvaku Kula (Clan) or Surya Vamsa. As a matter of fact, even today, the ritual Vibhisana Bandapana is observed in the temple of Shri Jagannath. Further, in the Kiskinda Kanda of theRamayana, there are references to the names of Sri Jagannath among other deities.

In the Mahabharata, the tale of King Indradyumna and the tank named after him is a direct reference to the Jagannath lore. In this epic, there is description of Vedi, which is identified by the scholars as Antarvedi or the seat of Sri Jagannath in the Samkha Kshetra. In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, a reference has been made to the Jagannath Dharma.

Mention of Sri Jagannath and the Purusottama Kshetra abound in Puranic literature of Matsya Purana, Vishnu Purana, Agni Purana, Padma Purana, Narada Purana, Brahma Purana and Skanda Purana.

Also that, in some Sanskrit texts like Kapila samhita, Tirtha Chintamani, Niladri Mahodaya, Rudrayamala, Tantrayamala, Purusottama Tatwaetc. references to Sri Jagannath have been made.

The Jagannath Astakam of Adi Shankaracharya is another important historical literary piece on Shri Jagannath which provides information about the temple and appearance of the deity.

Apart from the above Puranic and other ancient texts, the mention of Shri Jagannath in medieval Oriya literature is enormous. Almost everyOriya literature literateure like Sarala Dasa, Jagannath Dasa, Jayadeva, Balaram Dasa, Achyutaand Dasa, Jasobanta Dasa, Ananta, Upendra Bhanja, Baladeva, Dinakrush Dasa, Kavi Jadumani have composed invocations, prayers pertaining to Shri Jagannath.

In the modern Oriya literature, Shri Jagannath has been a common reference point, both on historical as well as mythical paradigms. The most acknowledged literary pieces on Shri University of Oxford

Journal

Jagannath are Nila Shaila and Niladri Vijaya by reknowned Odia writer Late Shri Surendra Mohanty [10], with the author receiving the Kendra Sahitya Academy award in 1969 for the novel.

Hare Krishna…

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